

A Greek Christian Text on the Seven Sages: Ps.-Athanasius, *On the Temple at Athens*

Adam C. McCollum

The Greek text translated here was published in A. Delatte, “Le déclin de la Légende des VII Sages et les Prophéties théosophiques”, *Musée Belge* 27 (1923): 97-III.¹ My copy of the article is of low quality and not easily readable, so I have retyped the text and numbered the paragraphs; the text follows the translation.² The meaning of some parts of the text is hardly obvious, and I welcome corrections and comments sent to acmccollum101@gmail.com.

English translation

On the Temple, Schools, and Theatres in Athens
Commentary of Athanasius the Great on the Temple in Athens

1 Those who do not understand the divine scriptures we ought to persuade concerning the knowledge of God further from the nature of things itself, for we see certain essences in creation that cooperate³ with each other not naturally but supernaturally. As an example I mention the essence of water, a nature that is flowing and having a downward tendency: how, then, do we see the so-called water-spouts carrying water up out of the sea to the clouds? But more surprising is

¹Cf. A. von Premerstein, “Ein pseudo-athanasianischer Traktat mit apokryphen Philosophensprüchen im Codex Bodleianus Roe 5,” in *Εἰς μνήμην Σπυρίδωνος Λάμπρου* (Athens, 1935), 183-186. I have not closely compared the two texts word for word, something a thorough study would naturally entail. In addition, some of the prophecies also appear in H. Erbse, ed. *Theosophorum Graecorum fragmenta* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner, 1995).

²Commissioned by Mr. Roger Pearse. At <http://www.apologitis.com/gr/ancient/profiteies.htm> are essentially the same excerpts from Vat. Gr. 1198, which Delatte had also used, and other manuscripts, together with a translation into modern Greek.

³Lit. “serve”.

the fact that [what had been] salty, as it returns to the earth, comes down through the rain as something sweet. And again, how does the nature of bodies, naturally sinkable, appear unsinkable and unsubmergeable in the waters of the Pentapolis of Marmarica?⁴ Not only this, but at one time in Lycia on the mountain called Olympus nature was also the reverse of both water and fire⁵ at the same time, as countless people have seen, and even to the present [people] witness this, and countless other paradoxes are seen and marveled at in creation, things that would not thus be destined to be supernatural, were it not for some essence of God mastering them and commanding them not to oppose each other. O children of the Greeks! How, when there is severe thunder, does all human nature tremble, shudder, and stop dumbfounded, declaring through that bearing that it is under [the power of] a master who effects the thunder?

2 While these things bring examples for the knowledge of God to the simpler ones among the Greeks, to the wise among them certain wise men of the Greeks from among the old and able philosophers declared many testimonies concerning reverence for God, and they even dimly declared beforehand the economy of Christ. For many years before the arrival of Christ, a certain wise man, Apollo by name — moved, I believe by God — founded the temple in Athens, having written on its altar, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. In this [temple], then, were gathered the first philosophers of the Greeks, that they might ask him about the temple and about prophecy and reverence for God. Their names, we will say, are these: first Titon, second Bias, third Solon, fourth Cheilon, fifth Thucydides, sixth Menander, seventh Plato. These seven philosophers spoke to Apollo: “Prophecy to us, O prophet Apollo: what is this temple, and whose is this altar behind you?” Apollo said to them: “Whatever pertains to virtue and good order, arise to do, [and] do it! For I announce the triune ruler on high, whose ineffable *Logos* will be conceived in a free⁶ girl. Like a fire-bearing bow, he will bring a gift to [his] father that, [instead of killing], has taken captive the whole world. Mary is her name.”

3 This is the explanation of the prophecy: The first saying has to do with the temple. He says to do what pertains to the good order of the temple along with practicable beauty: do things pleasing to God and to people. For I take [God] to be a great king on high in three persons in heaven: its⁷ God without beginning, and *Logos* becomes flesh in an unmarried girl, and he will appear like a fire-bearing

⁴In North Africa on the coast of modern Libya. Swimming in these waters was apparently like like swimming in the Dead Sea, i.e. like floating.

⁵The meaning is not clear, the more so since he gives no example of the occurrence.

⁶That is, unbound. It is used elsewhere of Mary; see Lampe 31 s.v.

⁷Heaven's, the temple's?

bow — or something more powerful — to the whole world, fishing for people as for fish from the depth of unbelief and ignorance, people whom he will offer as a gift to his own father. Mary is her⁸ name. Apollo said these things in prophecy.

4 Titon said, “There will come a young girl who has progeny for us, the heavenly child of [our] God and Father. The girl conceives without a man.” Bias said, “He has come from the heavens, an exceeding, immortal fire of flame, at whom, heaven, earth, and sea tremble, [together with] the hells⁹ and the demons of the deep, [the one who is] self-engendered¹⁰ and thrice-happy.” Solon said, “Eventually at some time will God drive on¹¹ to this much-divided earth and without error become flesh; in the bounds of his inexhaustible divinity he will destroy the corruption of incurable sufferings, the ill-will of people will become bitter toward him, yet when he has been hung up like one condemned to death, he will humbly persuade each one.” Cheilon said, “He will be the inexhaustible nature of God, and [as] *Logos* he will derive from him [God] himself.” Thucydides said, “Honor God and learn! Do not seek who he is and how, for either he is or he is not: as he is, honor him!” Menander said, “The old is new and the new ancient, the father progeny and progeny a father. The one is three and the three one. Fleshless is of flesh. Earth has given birth to the heavenly king.” Plato said,¹² “Since God is good, he is not responsible for everything, as many people say; rather, for many things he is not responsible. We say that he and no other is responsible for good things: only of what is beautiful, hardly of what is bad.” In turn these seven spoke:¹³ they were concerned with the economy of Christ and with the holy trinity.

5 Another Greek sage, called Asclepius, along with some others, asked Hermes, more philosophical than all the philosophers, to give them a saying about God’s nature. Hermes took a pen¹⁴ and wrote as follows: “Except for some providence of the Lord of all, he would be wishing neither to reveal this saying, nor to occupy you with such deeds, that you ask about them, for it is not possible for such things to be handed over to the uninitiated, but [as for you], listening with the mind,

⁸The aforementioned “unmarried girl”.

⁹*Sic.* Perhaps read *ταρτάριοι* “hellish”, thus being an adjective alongside *βύθιοι* “of the deep”, and modifying “demons”?

¹⁰Unless this is the same as *αὐτοπατήρ* “very father” (cf. Lampe 272 s.v., and, for the concept, Isa 9:6).

¹¹The verb here is the regular word for conveying oneself on a horse, in a ship or chariot, etc., but the word object, the thing driven, is sometimes omitted, as here.

¹²Cf. *Rep.* 2, 379c.

¹³The Greek actually has two verbs of speech here, a relatively common construction (cf. LSJ s.v. A.II.2.), but I just use one verb in English.

¹⁴So Lampe 1234 s.v., but see Delatte’s note in the Greek text.

listen! There was only one: intellectual light before intellectual light, and it had unity from the mind in light and spirit. All things are from him and to him.¹⁵ One fertile, having come down from [another] fertile one onto fertile water,¹⁶ made the water pregnant.”¹⁷

6 You know how the children of the Greeks prophesied and declared beforehand the God who is before all eternity, his Son and Word likewise without origin, and his co-reigning and consubstantial Spirit, and declared beforehand the costly sufferings of the cross. To him be glory and power along with the Father without beginning and the all-holy Spirit forever and ever, amen!

Greek text

Περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ περὶ τῶν διδασκαλείων καὶ
τῶν θεάτρων ἐν Ἀθήναις
Ἀθανασίου τοῦ μεγάλου ἐξηγητικὸν περὶ τοῦ ἐν Ἀθήναις ναοῦ

1 Τοὺς τὰς θείας γραφὰς μὴ ἐπισταμένους ἐξ αὐτῆς λοιπὸν τῆς τῶν πραγμά-
5 των φύσεως πείσαι ὀφείλομεν περὶ θεογνωσίας. ὁρῶμεν γάρ τινας οὐσίας ἐν τῇ
κτίσει, οὐ κατὰ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ φύσιν μετ’ ἀλλήλων ὑπηρέτουσας· οἷον τι λέγω,
φύσις ἢ τῶν ὑδάτων οὐσία ῥευστὴ καὶ κατωφερὴς ὑπάρχει· πῶς οὖν ὁρῶμεν τοὺς
λεγομένους σίφωνας ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ὕδωρ πρὸς τὰς νεφελὰς ἀνάγοντας; τὸ δὲ
10 θαυμαστότερον ὅτι τὸ ἀλμυρὸν ἀνερχόμενον γλυκὺ ἐπὶ γῆς διὰ τῶν ὄμβρων κα-
τέρχεται. πῶς δὲ πάλιν ἢ τῶν σωματικῶν φύσις βολιστικὴ κατὰ φύσιν ὑπάρχουσα
ὁρᾶται ἀβόλιστος καὶ ἄδυτος ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι τῆς Μαρμαρικῆς Πενταπόλεως; οὐ
μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ γὰρ καὶ ὕδατος καὶ πυρὸς ἐναντία ἢ φύσις ὑπάρχουσα ἐν τῷ ἅμα
ἦν ποτε ἐν Λυκίας τῷ ὅρει τῷ λεγομένῳ Ὀλύμπῳ, καθὼς μυριάδες ἀνδρῶν ἐωρά-
15 κασι, καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἐκεῖνο βλέπουσι. καὶ ἄλλα δὲ μυρία παράδοξά ἐστιν ἐν
τῇ κτίσει θεωρούμενα καὶ θαυμάζόμενα ἅτινα οὐκ ἂν οὕτως ὑπὲρ φύσιν γενέσθαι
ἔμελλον, εἰ μὴ οὐσία τις θεοῦ ἦν τούτων δεσπόζουσα καὶ τούτοις ἐπιτρέπουσα
ἀλλήλοις μὴ ἀντιτάττεσθαι. ὧ Ἑλλήνων παῖδες, βροντῆς στερρᾶς γινομένης πῶς

¹⁵Cf. Rom 11:36.

¹⁶This almost certainly means seminal fluid, particularly in this context of generation and fertility. Cf. Arist., *Mete.* 382b13, where, along with wine and urine, ὀρός, which can refer to seminal fluid, is said to be a kind of “water” (i.e. a liquid).

¹⁷The Bodleian manuscript (the Greek is given in a note below) has Solon making the statement and it is different, but not necessarily clearer: “Progeny, having come down from progeny, made the [water] of the earth the water [again, seminal fluid] of the begetter.”

ἅπαντα ἢ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φύσις τρέμει, φρίττει τε καὶ ἐξίσταται, μηνύουσα διὰ τοῦ σχήματος ὅτι ὑπὸ δεσπότης ἐστὶ τοῦ τὰς βροντὰς ἐργαζομένου.

20 2 Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν πρὸς τοὺς ἀφελεστέρους τῶν Ἑλλήνων εἰς θεογνωσίαν φέροντα ὑποδείγματα, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς παρ' αὐτοῖς σοφούς, ἐκ φιλοσόφων ἀρχαίων δυνατῶν μαρτυρίας πολλὰς περὶ θεοσεβείας τινὲς Ἑλλήνων σοφοὶ ἔφρασαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ οἰκονομίαν ἀμυδρῶς προεμήνυσαν. καὶ γὰρ πρὸ πολλῶν χρόνων τῆς Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίας, σοφὸς τις ὀνόματι Ἀπόλλων θεόθεν, ὡς οἶμαι, ἐπικινηθεὶς
25 ἔκτισε τὸν ἐν Ἀθήναις ναόν, γράψας ἐν βωμῷ αὐτοῦ· Ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ. ἐν αὐτῷ τοῖνον συνήχθησαν οἱ πρῶτοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων φιλόσοφοι ἵνα περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτὸν καὶ περὶ προφητείας καὶ θεοσεβείας· ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐροῦμεν ταῦτα· πρῶτος Τίτων, δεύτερος Βίας, τρίτος Σόλων, τέταρτος Χείλων, πέμπτος Θουκυδίδης, ἕκτος Μένανδρος, ἑβδόμος Πλάτων. οὗτοι οἱ ἑπτὰ φιλόσοφοι ἔφησαν τῷ
30 Ἀπόλλωνι· Προφήτευσον ἡμῖν, προφήτα, ὃ Ἀπολλων, τίς ἐστίν ὃδε ναὸς τίνος τε εἴη μετὰ σε βωμὸς οὗτος. πρὸς οὗς ὁ Ἀπόλλων ἔφη· Ὅσα μὲν πρὸς ἀρετὴν καὶ κόσμον ὀρώρετε ποιεῖν, ποιεῖτε. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐφετμεύω τρισένα ὑψιμέδοντα, οὗ λόγος ἀφθεγκτός ἐν ἀδέτῳ κόρῃ ἔγκυμος ἔσται· ὥσπερ πυροφόρον τόξον ἅπαντα κόσμον ζωγρήσας πατρὶ προσάξει δῶρον· Μαρία δὲ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς.

35 3 Ἔστι δὲ ἡ λύσις προφητείας αὐτῆς· περὶ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ναοῦ ἐστίν ὁ πρῶτος λόγος· ὅσα, φησί, πρὸς κόσμον τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ κάλλος δυνατὸν ὑμῖν ποιῆσαι, τὰ ἀρέσκοντα τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώποις <ποιεῖτε>. ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑπολαμβάνω εἶναι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ τρισυπόστατον μέγαν ὑψιστον βασιλέα· τούτου ἀναρχὸς θεὸς καὶ λόγος ἐν ἀγάμῳ κόρῃ σαρκοῦται καὶ ὥσπερ πυροφόρον τόξον — ἢ ὡς δυναμώτερον —
40 <εἰς> ἅπαντα κόσμον φανήσεται, ἀλιεύων τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὥσπερ ἰχθῦα ἐκ τοῦ βυθοῦ τῆς ἀπιστίας καὶ ἀγνωσίας, οὐστinas προσάξει τῷ ἑαυτοῦ πατρὶ δῶρον· Μαρία δὲ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς. καὶ τοῦτο μὲν προφητεύων ὁ Ἀπόλλων εἶπε.

4 Τίτων ἔφη· Ἡξει ἡ νεᾶνις ἔχουσα ἡμῖν γόνον τὸν οὐράνιον, τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς παῖδα· ἢ ἄνανδρος κόρῃ κύει. Βίας εἶπεν· Οὗτος ἐστὶν ἀπὸ οὐρανῶν βεβηκώς, φλογὸς ὑπερβάλλον ἀθάνατον πῦρ· ὃν τρέμει οὐρανὸς γῆ τε <καὶ> θάλασσα, τάρταροι καὶ βύθιοι δαίμονες· αὐτοπάτωρ, τρισόλβιος. Σόλων εἶπεν· Ὅψέ ποτε ἐπὶ τὴν πολυσχεδὴ ταύτην ἐλάσειε θεὸς γαῖαν· καὶ δίχα σφάλματος σὰρξ γενήσεται· ἀκαμάτου θεότητος <ὄροις> ἀνιάτων παθῶν λύσει φθοράν. καὶ τούτῳ πικρὸς γενήσεται φθόνος λαοῦ καὶ πρὸς ὕψος κρεμασθεὶς, ὡς θανάτου κατὰδικος, πάντα πρᾶως πείσεται. Χείλων εἶπεν· Ἀκάματος φύσις θεοῦ γενήσεται· ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ αὐτοῦ οὐσιοῦται λόγος. Θουκυδίδης εἶπε· Θεὸν σέβου καὶ μάνθανε· μὴ ζῆτει δὲ τίς ἐστὶ καὶ πῶς· εἴτε γὰρ ἔστιν εἴτε οὐκ ἔστιν, ὡς ὄντα τοῦτον σέβου καὶ μάνθανε· εὐσεβὴς γὰρ τὸν νοῦν ὁ θέλων μανθάνειν θεόν. Μένανδρος εἶπεν· Ὁ παλαιὸς νέος καὶ ὁ νέος ἀρχαῖος· ὁ πατὴρ γόνος καὶ ὁ γόνος πατὴρ· τὸ ἐν τρία καὶ τὰ τρία
55 ἐν· ἄσαρκον σαρκικόν· γῆ τέτοκε τὸν οὐράνιον βασιλέα. Πλάτων εἶπεν· Ἐπειδὴ ὁ

θεὸς ἀγαθός, οὐ πάντων ἐστὶν αἷτιος, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν· πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος· καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν, οὐδενὸς ἄλλου, φαμέν αἷτιον εἶναι· μόνον τῶν καλῶν, κακῶν δὲ οὐκέτι. Αὐτὸς πάλιν ἔφησαν οὗτοι οἱ ἑπτὰ καὶ εἶπον· Εἶεν περὶ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ οἰκονομίας καὶ περὶ τῆς ἀγίας τριάδος.

60 5 Ἄλλος δὲ τις τῶν Ἑλλήνων σοφὸς μεθ' ἐτέρων τινῶν, Ἀσκληπιὸς λεγόμενος, ἤτησεν τὸν Ἑρμῆν τῶν πάντων φιλοσόφων φιλοσοφώτερον δοῦναι αὐτοῖς λόγον περὶ θεοῦ φύσεως. ὁ δὲ Ἑρμῆς λαβὼν σιφέριον ἔγραψεν οὕτως· Εἰ μὴ πρόνοια τις τοῦ τῶν πάντων κυρίου, οὐ μὴν τὸν λόγον τοῦτον ἀποκαλύψαι ἠβούλετο οὐδὲ ὑμᾶς τοιούτοις ἔργοις κατεῖχεν ἵνα περὶ τούτων ἐρωτήσητε. οὐ γὰρ ἐφικτόν ἐστιν
65 εἰς ἀμυήτους τοιαῦτα παρασχέσθαι μυστήρια, ἀλλὰ τῷ νοῖ ἀκούοντες ἀκούσατε· ἐν μόνον ἦν· φῶς νοερὸν πρὸ φωτὸς νοεροῦ· καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ ἔνωσις ἐκ τοῦ νοῦ φωτὶ καὶ πνεύματι· τὰ πάντα ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτόν· γόνιμος ἐξ γονίμου κατελθὼν ἐπὶ γονίμῳ ὕδατι ἔγκυσεν τὸ ὕδωρ ἐποίησεν.¹⁸

70 6 Οἶδας πῶς οἱ τῶν Ἑλλήνων παῖδες προεφήτευσαν καὶ τὸν προάναρχον Θεὸν καὶ τὸν συνάναρχον αὐτοῦ Υἱὸν καὶ Λόγον, καὶ τὸ σύνθρονον αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁμοούσιον Πνεῦμα προεκήρυξαν καὶ τὰ τίμια τοῦ σταυροῦ πάθη προεκύρηξαν· αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος σὺν τῷ ἀνάρχῳ Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Παναγίῳ Πνεύματι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων. ἀμήν.

¹⁸In the Bodleian text published by von Premerstein, this saying is put in the mouth of Solon and runs, Γόνος ἐκ γόνου κατελθὼν τοῦ γεννήτορος γόνιμον ὕδωρ ἐποίησε τὸ τῆς γῆς (153v).